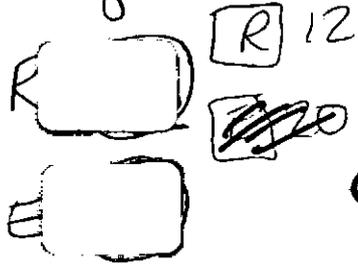


August 1995

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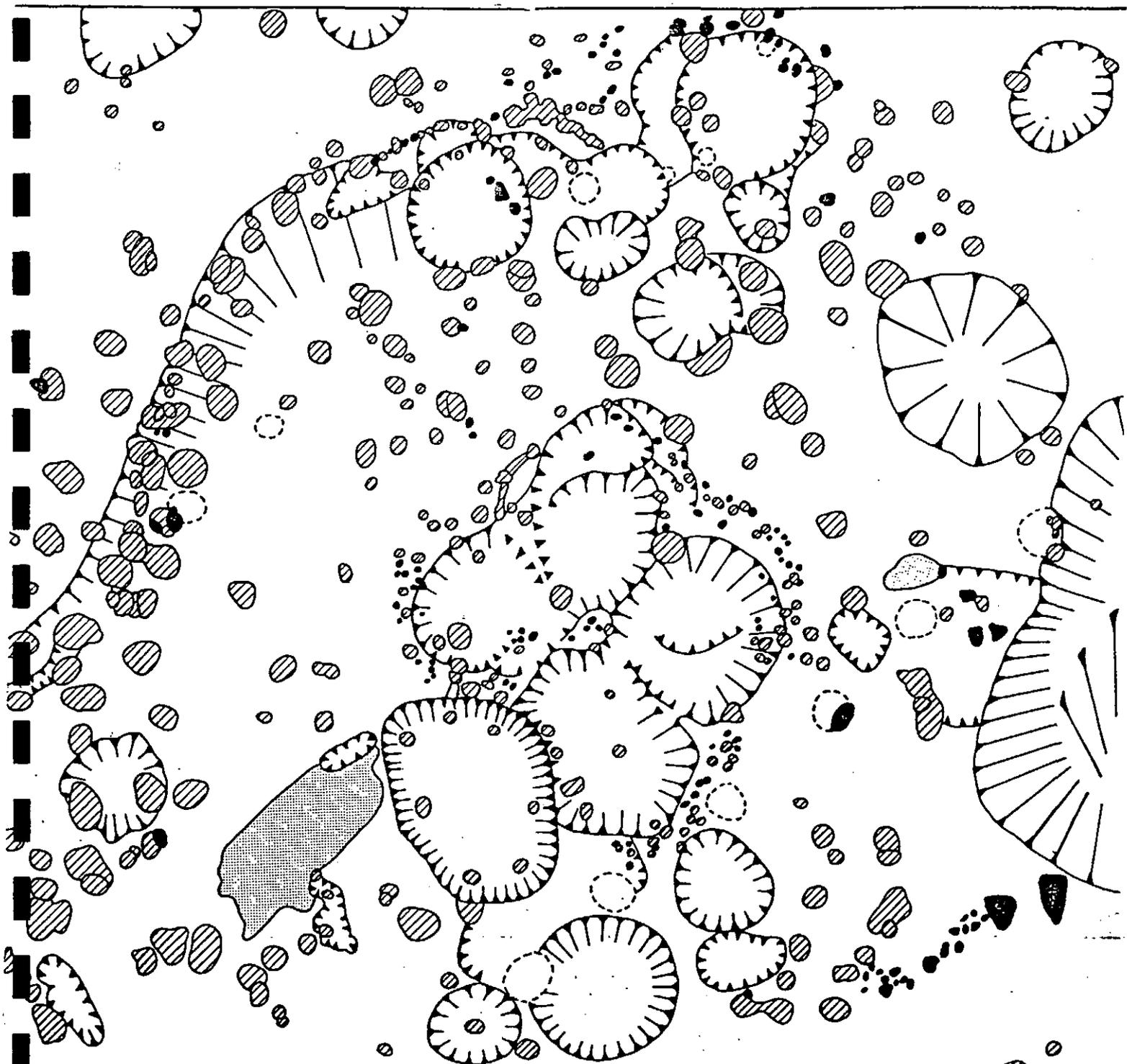
GMS Access Project, Phase II

EW 4102

An Archaeological Excavation

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Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust



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THE HERTFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

REPORT No. 129

GLAXO MANUFACTURING SERVICES  
PARK ROAD, WARE

PHASE II

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

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AUGUST 1995

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# **GMS ACCESS PROJECT PHASE II AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION**

## **INTRODUCTION (Figs. 1-2)**

During April, 1995, the Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological excavation in advance of the Glaxo Manufacturing Services' Access Project, Park Road, Ware. The site is located 300 m to the north of the river Lea, immediately north of Ware Football Club, on a grassed area known as 'The Buryfields' (NGR TL 354 145).

## **GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The present town of Ware lies on the north bank of the river Lea, on the lower slopes of the river valley. The underlying soils belong to the Melford association (Soil Survey of England and Wales), which are deep, well-drained fine loams over clay and fine loam or calcareous clayey subsoils. The more slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils of the Hanslope association can be found to the north and east of the town, on higher ground between the river Rib to the north and the Lea to the south. The surface geology consists of a chalky till.

The subsoil in the area of The Buryfields comprises sandy river gravels, forming an irregular, undulating surface. The resultant hollows have been infilled by dark orange sandy brick-earth of loessic (wind-blown) origin.

## **BACKGROUND (Fig. 2)**

The Roman town predating Ware lies to the west of the site, beneath the present Glaxo factory complex, on the route of *Ermine Street*, a major Roman road which once linked London with Lincoln.

A large amount of archaeological evidence has already been discovered inside the factory complex. A series of excavations during the late 1970s revealed the Roman road, a number of burials, including two in lead-lined coffins, and structures including workshops, dwellings, ovens, and a well. In addition to the Roman finds, scatters of worked flint dating from the Mesolithic period (6000-5000 BC) were found in the brickearth below the Roman horizons.

In 1989 the Trust carried out an excavation prior to the construction of the present P11 building, which again located *Ermine Street* and other structures associated with the Roman town.

As part of the current access project, excavations in June, 1995, revealed substantial Roman remains, including Ermine Street, a well, the remains of a large timber post-built structure, and a pond.

A two-phase archaeological evaluation was carried out by the Trust within the grounds of Ware Football Club, immediately south and west of The Buryfields (WFC1 - WFC8). The archaeological features found (mainly ditches, drains and rubbish pits) were on the eastern periphery of the Roman town, and represent activities which were conducted to the rear of buildings along Ermine Street.

In the late 1970s several large ditches and late Roman burials were recorded by the East Hertfordshire Archaeological Unit (HAU) during the laying of a sewage pipe along the eastern boundary of The Buryfields, indicating that Roman remains continued to be present some distance away from the Ermine Street.

The route of the new GMS access road and entrance within The Buryfields was the subject of an archaeological evaluation carried out by the Trust in December 1994 (Phase II, Trenches 1-6). No archaeological evidence was identified towards the north of the site in Trenches 1-4, or in Trench 6 to the south. However, ditches and pits containing Roman finds, including a complete bronze bracelet, were discovered in Trench 5, close to the northern boundary of Ware Football Club.

Six small trenches were also excavated in advance of tree planting (TP1-TP6). A substantial Roman layer, probably the fill of a large ditch or pit, was found in TP4. Other small features were discovered in TP5 and TP6.

Although most of the evidence has resulted from many small pieces of work carried out over a long period of time, when combined it provides a valuable contribution to our understanding of the development and decline of the Roman town.

## **METHODS OF WORK AND OBJECTIVES (Fig. 2-4)**

The excavation was designed to examine and record the archaeological features within the corridor of the proposed new site entrance. One trench (Phase II, Trench 7) was opened using a mechanical excavator to maximum dimensions of 27 x 17 m, and a depth of between 0.5 m and 0.9 m.

The archaeological remains exposed were then excavated by hand. The natural subsoil comprised a ridge of gravel approximately 8 m wide across the centre of the site, overlain by thick deposits of brickearth to the north and south.

The excavation strategy ensured that all zones and categories of features were examined, and that all uncommon and individual features were excavated and fully recorded. At least half of all pits, postholes and other discrete features were excavated, some meriting full excavation. Naturally all burials found within the trench were fully excavated.

## **THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE (Figs. 3-4)**

Earth moving in the post-medieval period had severely truncated the archaeological features. Residual fragments of human bone, derived from the Roman horizons, were recovered from post-medieval levelling deposits which overlay the archaeology.

Despite this, substantial archaeological remains had survived, and the features, mainly burials and ditches associated with a late Roman cemetery, cut the natural subsoil.

### ***Prehistoric Activity***

Seven features contained low densities of residual struck flint. Two pits (F139 and F115) contained above average quantities. F115 also contained an abraded residual sherd of Iron Age pottery.

Struck flints are the waste product from the manufacture of flint tools. They were not found in sufficient quantity to suggest that flint knapping was being carried out on site. The majority was found in conjunction with abraded sherds of Roman pottery, and both may have lain around on the ground surface for some of time before being buried.

One large piece of struck flint was found close to the head of a skeleton in a late Roman grave (F146). It was abraded, but appeared to have been placed carefully and deliberately in the grave.

Horizons of Mesolithic struck flints are known to be present within the brickearth. Thirty litres of the deposit was dry-sieved at regular five-metre intervals in an endeavour to detect evidence of earlier activity. None was found to be present.

### ***Roman Features Pre-Dating the Cemetery***

Five features pre-date the Roman cemetery. The most substantial of these were two large pits (F115 and F139) found towards the south end of the trench. Both were truncated by graves.

F115 was over 3.2 m in length, and continued beyond the western limits of the trench. Several residual struck flints and a sherd of Iron Age pottery were recovered from the brown clayey loam backfill (L116). In addition, Roman pottery, including fine locally-produced greyware with lattice decoration, was found. Most of the pottery is abraded.

F139, to the east, appeared to have been backfilled deliberately after use. An abraded rim from a 3rd-4th century greyware jar, a few struck flints, and some small fragments of animal bone were recovered during excavation.

On the western side of the trench, a small gravel-filled pit (F183) was truncated by a later narrow linear drain (F180). The latter ran into a second drain (F119), and both features were cut by the same Roman ditch (F109). Both F180 and F119 were filled

with gravel, and were aligned approximately NW/SE. F119 was over 9 m long, with a rounded terminal at either end. No finds were recovered from either feature.

### *A Late Roman Cemetery (3rd-4th Century)*

Other than human remains, relatively few finds were recovered from the cemetery. The cemetery would have been outside the boundary of the Roman town. Most of the pottery assemblages date from the 3rd-4th century, and comprise mainly small abraded sherds which cannot be dated with any greater accuracy.

Fifteen burials were excavated, two as only fragmentary evidence in disturbed pits or former graves. One grave-cut was empty. Two individuals were buried with objects or 'grave-goods'.

Eleven graves, including the empty grave-cut, were aligned at right-angles to Ermine Street, which passes to the west of the site on a NE/SW alignment. Five of these individuals were buried with heads to the west, and five with heads to the east. Three other graves were aligned parallel to the Roman road, one with the head to the south and one with the head to the north.

All the inhumations were supine (laid on their backs with straight legs), and comprised adults or juveniles. No infants were identified.

The three NE/SW burials described below may have been contained in coffins, but as one was not completely exposed and the others were disturbed, this is by no means certain.

Grave F133 truncates an earlier pit, F115, but only the legs of the skeleton were exposed, as the rest of the grave continued beyond the western limit of the trench. Two iron nails were retrieved from the fill (L134), which is suggestive of a coffin. The wood would have rotted away fairly quickly, leaving the nails that held it together in the backfill of the grave. Several small sherds of pottery were also recovered from the backfill, including some fine locally-produced decorated greywares (the pottery was derived from the surface through which the grave was cut).

Grave F123 was similarly aligned, but only the right arm had survived *in-situ*. Several other fragments of human bone were discovered within the fill of the grave (L124), and it was apparent that the burial had suffered considerable disturbance. One iron nail was discovered, possibly from a coffin, along with an abraded sherd of Roman pottery.

The third grave, F146, was in very good condition and the skeleton was complete. It shared the same alignment as F123 and F133, but with the head at the opposite end of the grave cut. It appeared to have been in a coffin: the arms were laid slightly away from the torso, and the rest of the body was laid out very flat, with the bones not constricted in any way that would suggest the body had been wrapped, tied, or placed in the grave without support. Although no nails were found, the coffin may have been held together with wooden pegs, which would not have survived. The skeleton was accompanied by two objects or grave-goods, including a bronze ring on the right hand,

which seemed to have been clenched into a fist, and a large struck flint to the left of the skull.

Of the seven graves that were orientated NWSE, the three most northerly ones (F187, F151, and F166) were unfortunately truncated during the post-medieval period and had been slightly crushed.

F187 was very shallow, and the skull and most of the torso were missing. The head was towards the west, and the forearms were crossed over the stomach. One small abraded sherd of samian and a fragment of lead alloy were retrieved from the backfill of the grave (L188). Samian was fine high-status pottery which was imported from Gaul in the 1st and 2nd centuries. It is likely that this sherd is residual.

Grave F151, immediately to the south-west, was also very shallow and truncated. The head of the skeleton was at the east end of the grave, turned towards the north. The right arm was laid across the legs, but the left one was broken and fragmentary. A few pottery sherds, including some greyware, and some other fragments of human and animal bone were found in the grave backfill (L152). A small fragment of animal bone had been cut and prepared for carving, possibly to make a pin or a peg.

To the south, Grave F169 was positioned with the head of the skeleton to the west of the cut, and the skull turned to face the south. The forearms were bent at the elbow to cross over the pelvis, but most of the torso was badly decayed. A few abraded pottery sherds were recovered from the grave backfill (L170).

South-west of F169, Grave F131 was a more substantial cut, approximately 0.3 m deep. The skull was placed at the east end of the grave, facing north. The knees were tight together, and the shoulders and arms were squashed against the ribs. The forearms were crossed over and the hands were tucked behind the pelvis. It is likely that the body was tied or wrapped very tightly in a cloth or burial shroud for the bones to be so constricted. A number of large stones were placed around the body, and this is likely indicative of a form of burial known as a pillar grave. A few sherds of abraded Roman pottery were recovered from the grave backfill (L132). The skeleton was in very good condition.

Grave F163 continued slightly beyond the eastern limits of the excavation, although it was possible to recover the entire surviving skeleton. The skull was at the west end of the grave, and most of the torso had decayed. The forearms were crossed over the abdomen, as was the case with most of the individuals excavated.

In the south end of the trench, Grave F141 truncated the fill of the earlier Pit F139. The skeleton was positioned with its head at the east end of the cut, facing north, with the forearms crossed over the abdomen in the apparently favoured position. Most of the torso had decayed. Two conjoining, slightly abraded sherds of Hadham pottery (red ware) were retrieved from the grave backfill (L142).

Only part of a foot and leg were recovered from the fill of Grave F160. The rest of the grave continued beyond the eastern limits of the trench.

Two graves were aligned NE/SW.

Grave F166 was 0.25 m deep, and the skeleton was very well preserved, with its head at the north end of the grave. The right forearm was bent across the chest, and the left forearm was laid across the stomach area. One other fragment of human bone, probably the resulting from disturbance of another grave, and a residual struck flint were retrieved from the grave backfill (L167).

F125 was the grave of a small (?) adult, probably a female. The centre of the cut measured 0.4 m in depth. The skeleton was very well preserved and all the bones were present. The head was laid towards the south, facing forward and propped up slightly. The arms were laid next to the body, but part of the left arm was disturbed, and several fingers were found in the chest region, suggesting the arm was once laid across the chest. The hook terminal of a pennanular bronze bracelet was also found close to the chest, and was probably worn on the left wrist when the body was buried. The bracelet would have been linked with a small chain, and was a type commonly worn in the 3rd and 4th centuries.

Two other features contained human remains. F178 was a substantial pit, over 0.5 m deep, extending beyond the eastern limits of the trench. A human skull and several other bones were recovered during its excavation, but it was unclear if this pit was originally intended as a grave. Interpretation was difficult because the remains had been disturbed, but it is possible either that the pit was used as a grave, or that a disturbed grave ended up in the general backfill of the pit.

F103 was a fairly shallow pit, in outline comparable to a grave, and aligned NW/SE. Fragments of disarticulated human bone were recovered from the fill (L104), but of particular interest was a virtually complete, handled, pedestal beaker in white ware with orange slip decoration, dating from the 3rd-4th century. An iron nail and a few small fragments of brick and tile were also recovered. It is possible that this pit was a much disturbed grave, and the pottery vessel was a grave good.

To the north of this feature an empty grave cut was identified, F158. It was again orientated NW/SE, and was similar in size and shape to other adjacent graves. It was backfilled with loose sandy gravel (L159), and contained no artefacts or human remains. It may have been used for a temporary internment.

The southern and eastern limits of the cemetery were not established, but it is likely that more graves are present in the grounds of the Football Club to the south of the trench. Human remains were recorded by the East Herts Archaeological Unit approximately 70 m to the east, indicating the cemetery extends (intermittently) for some distance in that direction.

At the northern end of the excavation trench, a row of four pits (F143, F190, F192, and F194) may indicate the northern limits of the cemetery, and certainly no graves were identified beyond their limit. F190, F192 and F194 were probably postholes. F190 contained large flint nodules which probably served as packing material. F192

and F194 were shallower and less substantial. They appeared to have silted naturally after they fell into disuse, and no finds were recovered from their fills.

F143 was larger than the other three, and had been deliberately backfilled after use (L144). Several fragments of animal bone, including the jaw of a pig, were found in conjunction with a small number of human bone fragments. A few sherds of abraded greyware pottery and the tip of an iron nail were also retrieved.

The western limits of the cemetery may have been defined by two ditches: a wider inner ditch (F109) and a smaller outer one (F107). Both were parallel to Ermine Street, and both terminated at their north end, within the confines of the trench. It is tentatively suggested that they mark the position of an entrance.

F109 was over 6 m long and 0.35 m deep, continuing beyond the southern limits of the excavation with a wide rounded terminal to the north. The backfill (L110) contained a single sherd of Roman pottery, a fragment of brick or tile, and a few small fragments of animal bone. It truncated an earlier drain, F119, and was cut by a later posthole, F111.

F107, to the west, was slightly narrower and more shallow. It had been backfilled after use (L108), and was truncated by a later pit, F105. Small quantities of tile, abraded pottery sherds, and animal bone including fragments of cow, were recovered from its fill. Also found was a small-denomination, late 3rd century, bronze coin, an *antoninianus*.

A smaller shallower ditch (F137), aligned east-west, was identified towards the south of the trench, terminating within the confines of the excavation, and continuing beyond the excavation to the west. It contained a similar backfill to many of the graves in the area. The backfill (L138) contained fragments of animal bone and abraded Roman pottery, and a small bronze coin dating from 335-341 AD.

### *Features Post-Dating the Late Roman Cemetery*

A small post hole (F111) and two pits (F105 and F121) truncated either the graves or the ditches which are tentatively identified as being contemporary with the cemetery.

F105 is probably a pit, although it may be a wide ditch terminal (it was not fully defined because it continued beyond the western limits of the excavation). It was over 0.3 m deep, 1.2 m wide, and truncated Roman Ditch F107. The feature was backfilled after use (L106) and contained no finds.

To the east of this, truncating F109, was a shallow ovoid posthole (F111). The dark distinctive fill (L112) had been heavily truncated, and contained only a few small fragments of animal bone.

F121 was a shallow subovoid pit truncating earlier grave F123. The beaded rim of an abraded Roman pottery vessel and a few fragments of animal bone were recovered during the excavation of the sandy loam backfill (L122).

Several other discrete features, mainly small shallow pits (F113, F117, F156, F172, F174, and F176) and small postholes (F149, F154, and F185), contained no finds and their relationship to the cemetery is uncertain. F149 and F154 are similar, and may represent a small two-post structure.

### *Post-Medieval Activity (17th-19th Century)*

The archaeological features which cut the natural subsoil were overlain by a thick, uniform layer of levelling material (L100). It was present throughout the excavation trench and extends into the grounds of Ware Football Club. It contained several abraded Roman sherds and human bone. The layer was 0.35m-0.6 m thick, comprising dark brown sandy loam, overlain by modern topsoil and turf.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Part of a late Roman cemetery was identified within the area of the excavation. The lay out of Roman towns is such that the location of the cemetery likely denotes the eastern limits of the Roman settlement. The cemetery extends into the grounds of Ware Football Club, however, the recent geophysical survey suggests that the graves are not numerous.

The bracelet worn by one of the inhumations dates to the 3rd - 4th century, and the burial traditions are also typical of late Roman cemeteries.

There is sparse evidence of occupation pre- and post-dating the cemetery.

The majority of the graves were orientated NW/SE. Twelve more or less complete, and two much disturbed, burials were recorded. One grave was empty. Most of the burials appear to have been wrapped in simple cloths or burial shrouds. The bones of one individual were very tightly compressed, suggesting they were tied or wrapped very tightly. All were supine burials, and the majority had their forearms crossed over in front of the pelvis. There was evidence that at least two individuals had been placed in coffins: several iron nails, likely derived from a wooden coffin, were recovered from the backfills. Few of the burials contained grave goods. They were likely kept to a minimum during the christian era. Two individuals wore simple items of jewellery: a small bronze ring and a bronze bracelet. The majority of the skeletons recovered are in good condition, as are others which have been previously found in association with the settlement.

Dr Tony Waldron, addressing the importance of the cemetery, writes, 'Inhumation became the common burial rite in Roman Britain during the late second century. Most Roman cemetery sites excavated in Hertfordshire to date have been largely earlier cremation cemeteries, dating from the 1st century AD (eg Skeleton Green, Puckeridge and King Harry Lane, St Albans). Elsewhere in Britain inhumation cemeteries have been excavated, some with huge numbers of burials (eg. Poundbury, Dorset and Cirencester, Gloucs.), but though some Roman inhumations have been found in St

Albans, Welwyn and Baldock, no large cemeteries have been examined, except at Royston Road, Baldock. Any further information regarding the Romano-British population of the county is therefore of importance.

An increase in the number of burials from Ware would make observations on the demography of the population possible. Pathological evidence will provide information about the prevalence of disease and the diet of individuals, making an important contribution to our understanding of the development and decline of the settlement's population during the Roman period.

The location of the cemetery is also significant in understanding the layout and geographical limits of the town. This evidence, combined with the results of previous excavations, will allow a more accurate reconstruction to be achieved.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Trust is grateful to Glaxo Manufacturing Services Ltd for their co-operation and funding of the excavation. In particular the Trust would like to thank David Gilbert and Brian Roger for their support and for their assistance in ensuring the smooth-running of the site works.

The Trust would also like to thank Dr Tony Waldron for his comments concerning the late Roman cemetery.

**HAT 156 GLAXO ACCESS PROJECT PHASE II - EXCAVATION WITHIN THE BURYFIELDS, PARK RD, WARE  
CONCORDANCE OF FINDS**

CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	TR	SPOT DATE	POT SHERDS	SAMIAN SHERDS	BUILDING MATERIAL	FLINT	ANIMAL BONE	HUMAN BONE	NOTES AND OTHER FINDS
U/S	Unstratified	7		5						
100	Levelling layer	7	Post-Med	5			1 flake	27 pieces	9 frags	ABRADED POT - 1 glazed sherd
104	Fill of pit/dist grave 103	7	Roman (3rd-4th C)	1 vessel		2 brick/tile frags			17 frags	Vessel is almost complete. SF.8 - Iron Nail
108	Fill of ditch 107	7	Roman (? 3rd C)	11		5 brick/tile frags		4 pieces		Some sherds ABRADED SF.9 - Cu Alloy Coin
110	Fill of ditch 109	7	Roman	1		1 brick/tile frag		3 pieces		
112	Fill of pit/posthole 111	7	?					4 pieces		
116	Fill of large pit 115	7	Roman	13			9 flakes			Some sherds slightly ABRADED
122	Fill of pit 121	7	?Roman	1				3 pieces		ABRADED POT
124	Fill of grave 123	7	Roman	1					17 frags	ABRADED POT. SF.1 - Iron nail
126	Fill of grave 125	7	Roman (?3rd-4th C)	13					1 vertebra	SLIGHTLY ABRADED POT SF.2 - Cu Alloy Bracelet
127	Skeleton in grave 125	7	Roman (?3rd-4th C)					1 bone	BURIAL	
130	Skeleton in grave 123	7	Roman						BURIAL	Right arm only survives in-situ
132	Fill of grave 131	7	Roman	3						ABRADED POT
134	Fill of grave 133	7	Roman	12			3 flakes	3 pieces	15 frags	1 ABRADED SHERD. 2 Nails
135	Skeleton in grave 133	7	Roman						BURIAL	Right and left legs recovered
136	Skeleton in grave 131	7	Roman						BURIAL	
138	Fill of ditch 137	7	Roman (?3rd-4th C)	3			2 flakes	2 pieces		SLIGHTLY ABRADED POT SF.3 - Cu Alloy Coin
140	Fill of pit 139	7	Roman (?3rd-4th C)				14 flakes	2 pieces		ABRADED POT
142	Fill of grave 141	7	Roman	2			2 flakes			ABRADED POT - conjoined sherds
144	Fill of pit 143	7	Roman	3				4 pieces	7 bones	SLIGHTLY ABRADED POT SF.4 - Tip of Iron Nail
145	Skeleton in grave 141	7	Roman						BURIAL	Arms, legs and skull surviving
147	Fill of grave 146	7	Roman	1			1 piece -SF 6			SLIGHTLY ABRADED POT SF.5 - Cu Alloy finger ring SF.6 - Worked flint
148	Skeleton in grave 146	7	Roman						BURIAL	

CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	TR	SPOT DATE	POT SHERDS	SAMIAN SHERDS	BUILDING MATERIAL	FLINT	ANIMAL BONE	HUMAN BONE	NOTES AND OTHER FINDS
152	Fill of grave 151	7	Roman	5				5 pieces (1 worked?)	1 frag + 1 skull frag	Some sherds slightly ABRADED. 2 Oyster shell
153	Skeleton in grave 151	7	Roman						BURIAL	
162	Skeleton in grave 160	7	Roman						BURIAL	Parts of foot and leg only
165	Skeleton in grave 163	7	Roman						BURIAL	Arms, legs, skull and misc. frags
167	Fill of grave 166	7	Roman		1		1 flake		1 piece	
168	Skeleton in grave 166	7	Roman						BURIAL	
170	Fill of grave 169	7	Roman	3						SLIGHTLY ABRADED POT
171	Skeleton in grave 169	7	Roman						BURIAL	Legs, arms and skull
182	Skeleton in grave/pit 178	7	Roman						?BURIAL	Skull + several bones - disturbed
188	Fill of grave 187	7	Roman	1	1					ABRADED POT. SF. 7 - Lead Alloy Frag
189	Skeleton in grave 187	7	Roman						BURIAL	Very fragmentary

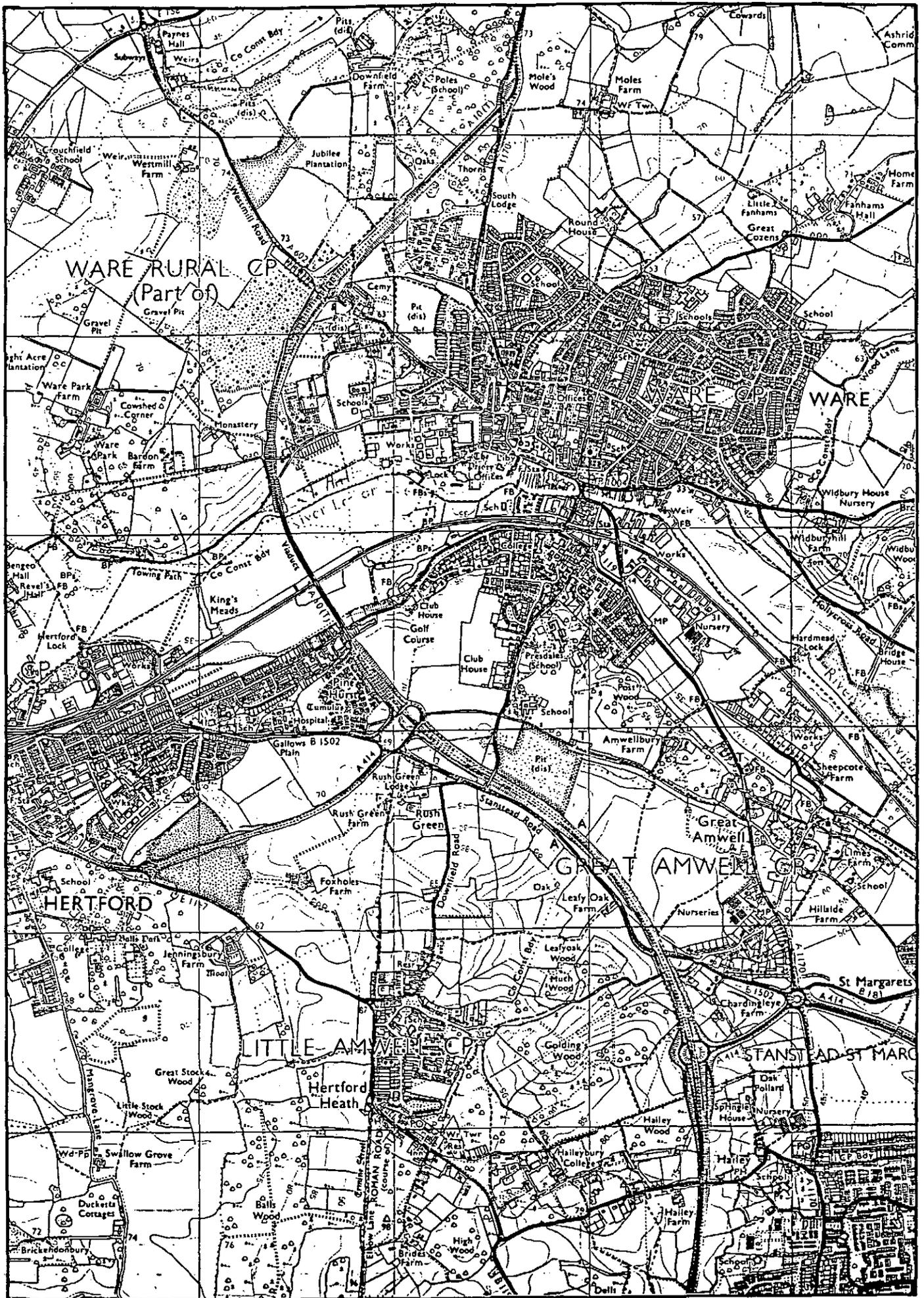


Fig.1 Site Location Plan

Fig.2 GMS Access Project, Location of Archaeological Trenches

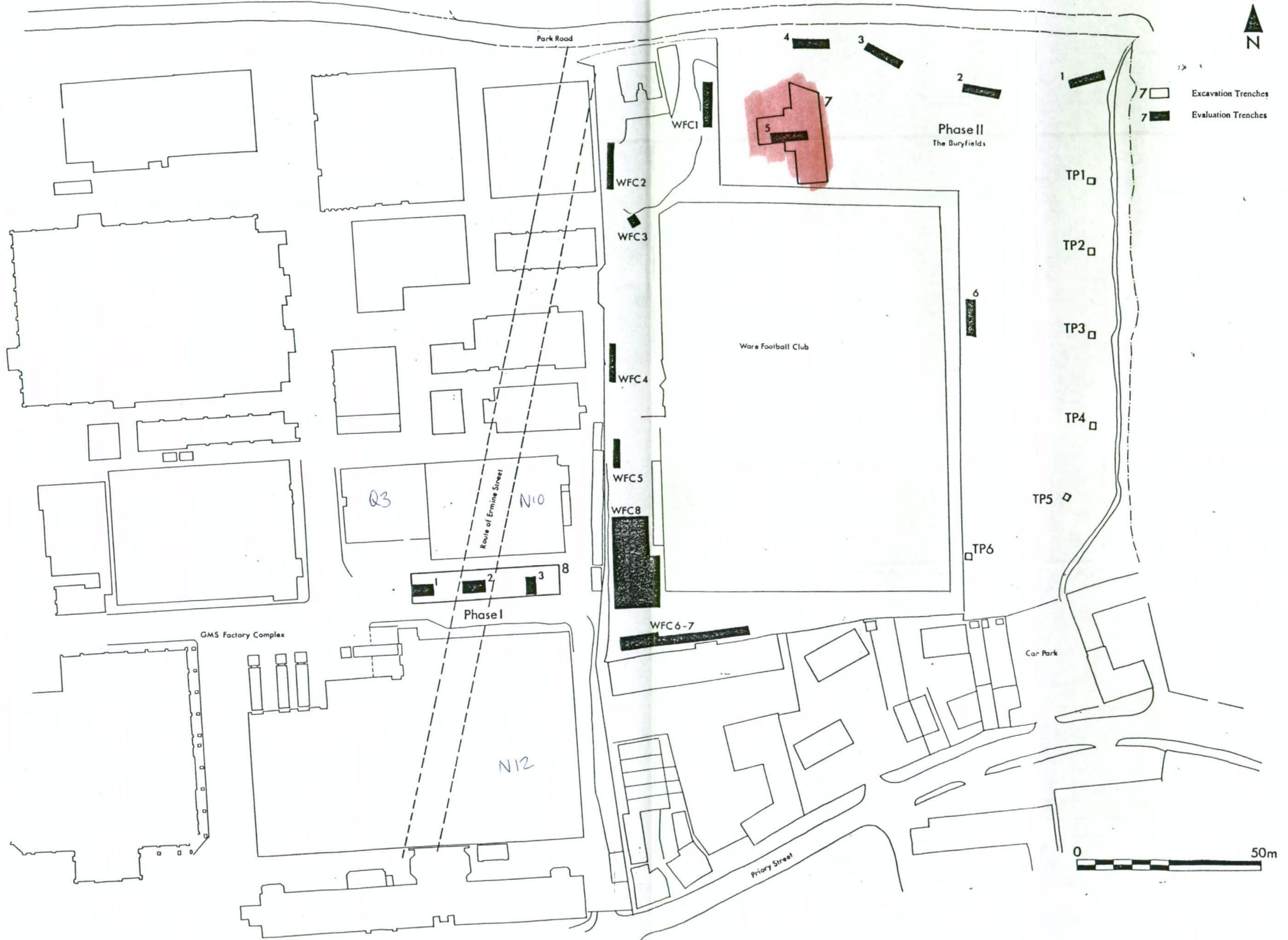
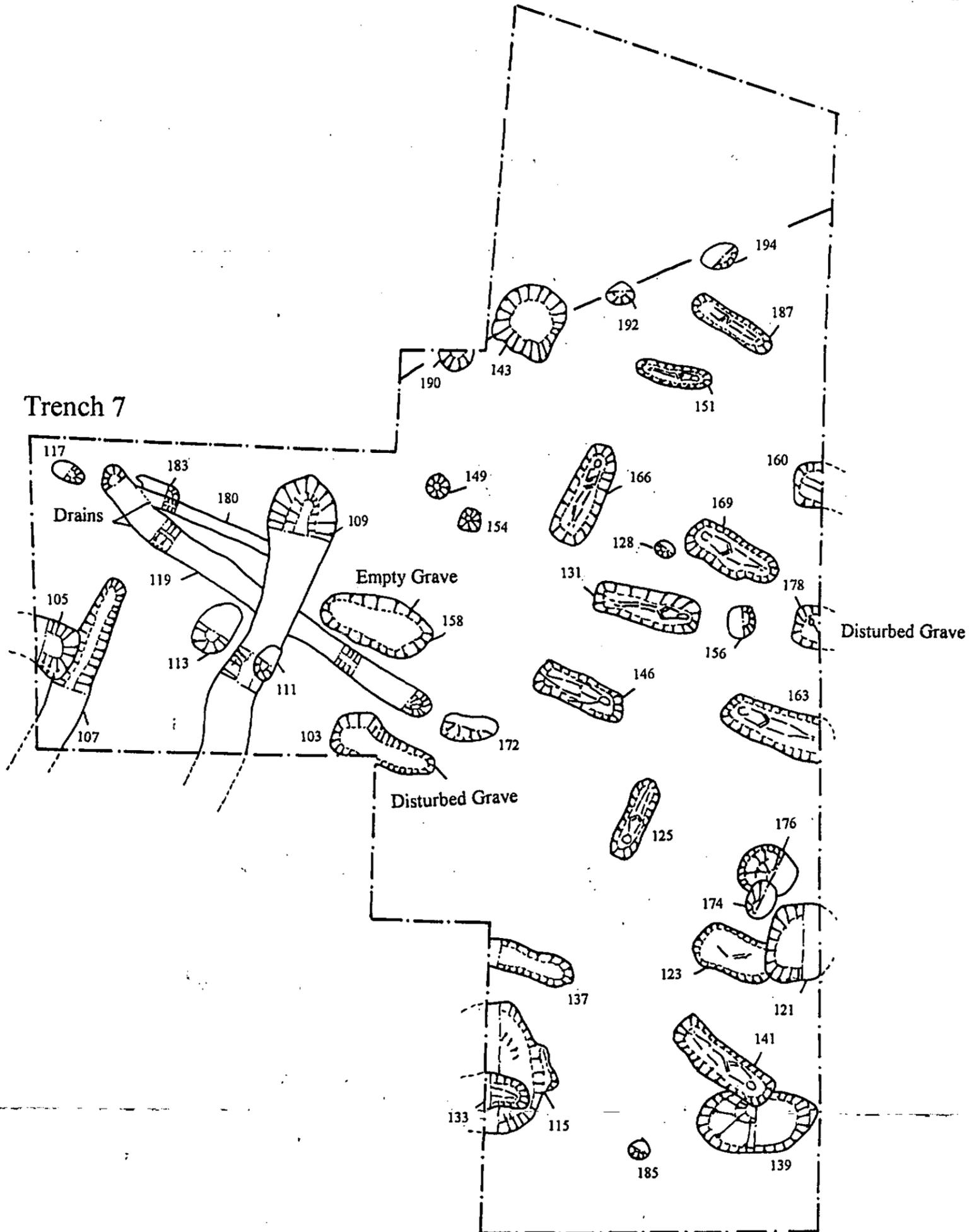
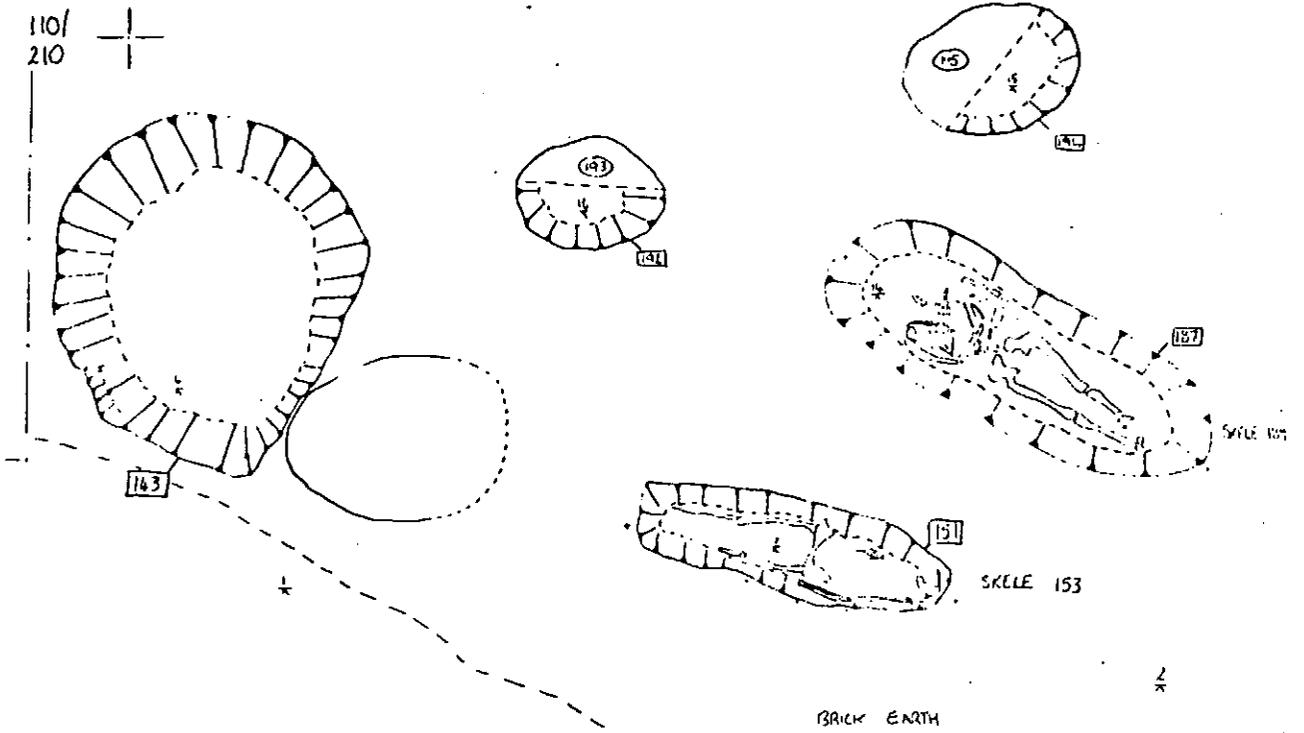


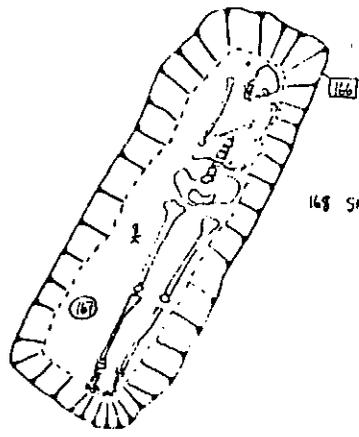
Fig.3 Plan of Archaeological Features



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210



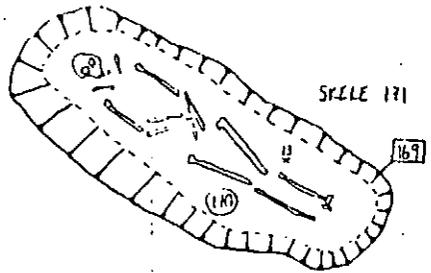
BACK EARTH



168 SKELE

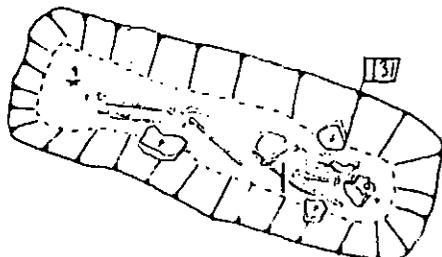
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3



SKELE 171

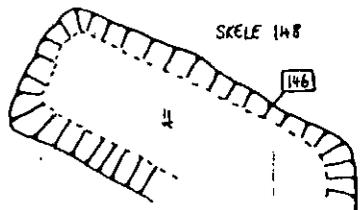
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SKELE 136

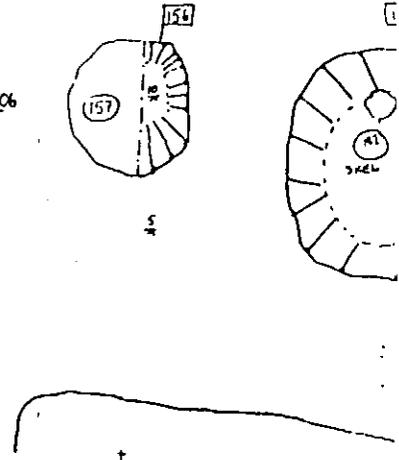
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4



SKELE 148

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200



5